



K. MacDonald

RED CROSSBILL

BY KELSEY

A woodland finch, Red Crossbills are stocky birds with an uncommon variation of sizes. Some are almost as small as a chickadee, while others can be larger than a Brown-headed Cowbird.

Male Red Crossbills are a brick red in colour, with darker wings and tails. The females are a brown or olive above with a yellow underside.

They have a short, notched tail and are named for their unusual bill, which crosses when closed instead of meeting like most birds. Their bill is so uniquely shaped due to their primary diet; conifer seeds. This highly specialized bill allows them to break into unopened conifer cones, which other finch species can't do.

Like other bird species, crossbills can exert more force closing their bill than they can opening it. To open the conifer cones, the crossbill places the tip of their slightly open bill under a cone scale and bites down, causing the crossed tips to spread the cone and expose the seed inside.

Red Crossbills rely so heavily on conifer seeds that they will feed them to their young and are willing to breed at any time of the year, as long as they have a sufficient cone crop.

Crossbills can sometimes move locations, or *irrupt*, based on food supply, and may be found at a distance from their usual range if the cone crop is better there.

During breeding season, male Crossbills often chase females when searching for a partner.

Once established, the pair engages in bonding activities like *billing*, where they touch bills rapidly and repeatedly, and courtship feeding.

Crossbill nests are built primarily by the female, though the pair selects the location together. They'll lay 2 to 6 eggs per brood, and usually nest in late summer to early autumn or late winter to early spring, though they can nest any time of year if there's a decent crop of food.

Different Red Crossbill populations can have distinct bill shapes and flight calls. Rather than grouping these diverse populations under subspecies, ornithologists have instead grouped them into *types*.

The different types have wide, overlapping ranges and can sometimes join up with other Red Crossbills. They don't, however, usually mate outside their type, which suggests that crossbill types could eventually differ further into full species.

One of them, the Type 9, already has. In 2015 it gained full species status and is now known as a Cassia Crossbill.



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MALE BUSHTIT VS FEMALE BUSHTIT

MALE BUSHTIT (LEFT) AND FEMALE BUSHTIT (RIGHT)



MALE BUSHTIT
—J. MORRISON

BUSHTITS are small, plump birds with long tails and short, stubby bills. They're a fairly basic gray-and-brown in colour, with slightly darker backs. Bushtits gather in flocks during the fall and winter that can consist of 10 to 40 birds, and even during nesting they aren't as territorial when flock members are nearby.

MALE AND FEMALE BUSHTITS are basically identical, with their only visual difference being eye colour. The female bushtit has a paler yellow eye, while her male counterparts' is dark. If you can get close enough to see the difference, it's a fairly easy tell.



FEMALE BUSHTIT
—R. HOCKEN

FEEDING STELLER'S JAYS

BY KELSEY



August is when we can start to see the first few Steller's Jays showing up. These jays enjoy a wide variety of food including insects, small vertebrates, fir cones, and other natural seeds found in their habitat. Their diet can range depending on what's available in their area.

To attract these visually stunning birds to your yard, add peanuts, sunflower seeds, or suet to an open tray feeder. They prefer the easy to use open trays, but if they can get a good foothold they will eat from other styles like tube feeders as well.

If you don't have a feeder appropriate for jays, you can also simply put out a few peanuts in the shell or sunflower seeds along a railing or other flat surface where the birds can see them, and watch.

Like most birds, Steller's Jays are energy efficient. They are trying to get the most reward (energy) from the least amount of work. The jay will pick and choose only the heaviest seeds first, because the chances of them having a larger, more worthwhile seed inside is higher.

They do eventually make their way through all the offered peanuts, but watching them choose the first few so carefully is always enjoyable.

To prepare for fall and the winter that follows, jays will cache seeds away. The cached seeds are hidden away to be used as a potential emergency food supply in case the natural food supply dwindles too far over the winter.

We recommend feeding jays at a distance from other birds and feeders, as they are prone to taking over the area due to their larger size and cheeky attitude. Put out a little bit of food at a time, and don't let them bully you into putting more and more out or you'll find yourself out of seeds before long!

Peanut Wreath

Easy to fill with peanuts in the shell for the enjoyment of your visiting jays or squirrels.

For use with peanuts in the shell. Jays and squirrels can cling to the wreath and pull the peanuts free to carry off and enjoy.



\$42.99 ea.



SUMMER WITH THE BIRDS

BY KELSEY

With August's summer heat in full swing, we may be starting to think longingly of the cooler fall weather to come. Birds, and other animals, are also starting to think fall, but for a very different reason.

For birds, now is the time to start preparing for winter. Backyards may appear to be quieter, especially during the hottest period of the day, but there's still plenty of activity going on.

Activity is more likely to concentrate at the beginning and end of the day, when the heat is at it's lowest. Nesting is also coming to an end as the last broods fledge and start flitting around before birds begin to make their way south or disperse deeper into the woods in search of the higher value natural seed.

While you may notice them still making a pit stop at your backyard feeders, with the summer heat they are more likely to be attracted by a source of fresh drinking water.

If you already have a water dish or bird bath out, make sure to keep it clean and topped up. If you don't, now might be a great time to add one and see who stops by.

Besides water, suet is another thing that can start to get busier again heading into September. With Northern Flickers, Downy, Hairy, and even Pileated Woodpeckers bringing their young around, backyard suet feeders can be quite attractive.

One suet fiend that we are seeing less of right now is the European Starling. By now, the starlings are starting to flock together and search for insects and berries to eat rather than clearing you out of your entire stock of suet cakes.



With breeding season over, birds are also starting to gather in flocks instead of pairs. Chestnut-backed Chickadees, American Goldfinches, and Bushtits are a few of the first that you may start seeing in groups of ten or more as we approach the end of the summer.

As fall gets closer, more backyard birds will also start to flock together in larger groups, to prepare for the coming winter.

Another thing to look out for? The fall migration!

Shorebirds and seabirds are starting to arrive at local beaches before

making their way south. To spot them,

look around at the Englishman River Estuary, Columbia Beach, the Nanaimo River Estuary, and other areas along the shoreline of Vancouver Island.



Commonly seen shorebirds include Least and Western Sandpipers, Black-belly Plovers, and Yellowlegs. You can also keep an eye out for Harlequin Ducks and Sandhill Cranes.

If they haven't left already, the Rufous hummingbirds are going to be finishing their migration south. Some Rufous could have tried for a second brood with our relatively nice weather, which would lead them to hang around longer, potentially into the beginning of August.

When the Rufous do go, they will first visit higher elevations and meadows to stock up on food energy before they begin to head south.

If you're lucky, you may spot a few Rufous in September, that had been further north, as they swing back through. While they winter around Mexico, Rufous hummingbirds have been seen in the spring and summer as far north as southern Alaska.

Though the Rufous may be going, it's not the time to start putting away your hummingbird feeders as our other local species, the Anna's, stays with us all year long.

New VILLAGER PUZZLES



Vancouver Island based puzzle company that works with various Canadian artists to create gorgeous, locally inspired pieces for you to enjoy.

Each puzzle is designed by people for people, with matte-finished, perfect fit pieces made out of recycled premium paper board.

\$32.99 ea.



DID YOU KNOW?

European Starlings have a hard time hanging upside down, but woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches, and other suet eating birds can do it no problem?





R. Hocken

BIRDS IN WILDFIRE SEASON

BY KELSEY

Birds, like us and everything else in Canada during this time of the year, have to deal with wildfires and smoke. Unlike us, they aren't given an evacuation warning if they're in a dangerous fire area so what do they do?

Fire and heat is an obvious danger, but not as much research has gone into another important aspect of wildfires and how it affects wildlife like birds; smoke.

Smoke can move much further than flames or heat, and it can be just as dangerous or more, especially for birds. It's made up of a not-so-healthy mix of dust, tiny particles, and toxic gases that can cause real problems.

We already know that humans can develop serious issues when exposed to wildfires and smoke, but there hasn't been as much studies into how birds handle it.

What we have discovered, however, is that birds likely face the same issues—inflammation, infections, and heart strain among others—that humans do, only more severely.

Birds' lungs aren't like human lungs; they're far more rigid, with balloon-like sacs to facilitate airflow in *one* direction. This means that birds breath in on both the exhale and inhale, instead of just the inhale like mammals do.

While this makes their respiratory system highly efficient for extracting oxygen, which comes in handy at high altitudes, it also makes them more susceptible to airborne pollutants.

Birds attempting to migrate, nest, or live in areas prone to wildfires sometimes have to adjust their routes and timing in order to avoid smoke or flames.

Some strategies that have been observed include stopping outside the range and waiting it out, flying higher to escape the worst of it, or even diverting their course entirely to reach their goal. These strategies run their own risks for wild birds, including starvation due to further flight distances, or exposure to smoke.

Despite all this, wildfires aren't necessarily bad for wild birds. Some bird species, including the American Robin, Chipping Sparrow, and Canada Jay, have no issues moving into recently burned habitat once the danger has passed.

Certain plant species, like the Jack Pine, actually require burning as a part of their life cycle. Wildfires also clear areas and make room for new growth, which in turn feeds the wildlife like birds.

This was feasible when the areas burned had time to regenerate and regrow between burns, but decimated habitats are becoming more common and lacking the required regeneration time before they are burning again.

REFERENCES

[When the Sky Turns Gray: What Smoke Means for Birds](#)

[Birds in the Line of Fire: How Boreal Birds Respond to Forest Fires](#)

[Is the Smoke from Wildfires Dangerous to Birds?](#)

[How Do Wildfires in Canada's Boreal Forest Affect Birds Across the Continent?](#)

Suet Nuggets

Suet nuggets are a great high energy snack for a variety of backyard birds, from chickadees and woodpeckers to juncos and sparrows.

Place on an open tray feeder or mix with your favourite bird seeds to give your birds a treat!

\$12.99 ea.



THE PIGEON GUILLEMOT

BY IVY-LYNNE

As we head into August and sink into those heady, late summer days, many of us are eager to escape the heat at local lakes and beaches. This not only gives us an opportunity to cool down, but it's also a great time to view many shoreside birds, including the Pigeon Guillemot.

The Pigeon Guillemot, or *Cephus Columba*, is a member of the cephus genus of birds. They're a shoreside bird found all over North America, including on Vancouver Island.

On the island, they've been seen here in Nanaimo but are primarily found in areas like Port Hardy, Victoria, Bull Harbour, and Campbell River.

Adult Guillemots have a dark, dark brown plumage that appears almost black. Their underwings are dark, with some white patches, and they are most commonly recognized by the vibrant crimson of their feet and mouth.

Pigeon Guillemots are solitary sea feeding birds, using their broad wings to dive and swim in the water. Though they typically dive between 30 and 60 feet, preying on small fish, crustaceans, and worms in underwater crevices and off the ocean floor, they've been noted going as deep as 150 feet.

For the most part, the guillemot is a solitary bird who doesn't spend much time cohabitating with other guillemots, outside of breeding season. While small colonies can sometimes group up, the most time a Pigeon Guillemot spends with it's own species is usually during courtship and nesting.

These guillemots are monogamous, and usually don't hit breeding age until they're three years old, though some have held off until five years of age. Courtship is a joint activity, with pairs circling each other and touching bills. Sometimes as practice, Pigeon Guillemots will chase each other in zig zags across the water.



The nesting sites of the Pigeon Guillemot are typically chosen by the male and consist of cliffsides, rock cavities, or even in human-made structures like pipes or cracks found in wharves. The nests

are built shallowly on a pile of dirt using shells and pebbles, and the guillemot can reuse it for several years.

Pigeon Guillemots lay one or two pale blue-green eggs with brown spots. Both parents contribute to the incubation process, which lasts for 26 to 32 days. Once hatched, the young remain in the nest for another 29 to 54 days before fledging.

Once fledged, the juvenile guillemots are capable of diving and swimming, though their flights remain short. These traits have led to Pigeon Guillemot chicks being recognized as *semi-precocial*, or somewhat less reliant on their parents than an altricial chick.

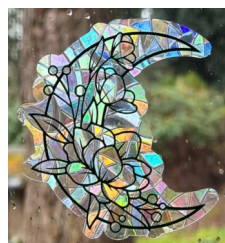
While we have no exact numbers for the Pigeon Guillemot population, it's somewhere upwards of 235 000. The largest populations, numbering around 2000 birds or more, were recorded in the Farallon Islands of California (also called the Devils Teeth Islands) and the Chukor Peninsula.

With this rather robust estimated population, the Pigeon Guillemot is not currently listed as endangered or threatened. They are still at risk of threats such as oil pollution, a fishing tactic known as gill-netting, and climate change.

Data about the migration habits of the Pigeon Guillemot are fathered by organizations like Blue Point Conservation Science, who put geolocator tags on various species to track flight patterns. Their work has shown us that Pigeon Guillemots overwinter in sites including Vancouver Island and as far north as Southeast Alaska.

The migration begins in early August, and returns to their breeding grounds as early as March.

If you have time this summer, head down to a local beach and see if you can spot one of these interesting birds!



SUNCATCHER STICKERS

Each decal is designed and handmade on Vancouver island. The static cling design makes them easy to apply, remove, or reuse in a new area.

Most are roughly 5.5" in diameter.

\$17.99 ea.

BIRD WALKS

Bird walks are on Sundays (Nanaimo) and Tuesdays (Parksville). Locations and cancellations are posted to thebirdstore.blogspot.com.

Bird walks are on pause for the summer months and should resume in early fall, with exact dates TBD. For updates, check our blog or join our mailing list.

We decide on the location of each bird walk the week before the scheduled bird walk outing. During the week, we compile information about what birds are being seen and examine the weather forecast to ensure the walk is scheduled for the most productive location.

Bird walks are not held during the summer months (July & August) but resume in early September. They also go on pause during the winter (December & January), resuming in early February.

There's no charge for our bird walks, and they are designed to conclude before lunch, averaging roughly 2 hours. All experience levels welcome.

Bring your own binoculars when possible, and decent walking shoes for the best experience.

Check out our [online map](#) for common bird walk locations around Nanaimo and Parksville.

HOURS OF OPERATION

Monday-Saturday 9:30-5:30

Sunday 12:00-4:30

UPCOMING HOLIDAY HOURS

August 3rd, **BC Day**: CLOSED

September 7th, **Labour Day**: CLOSED

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thebirdstore.blogspot.com

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WHAT'S HAPPENING IN AUGUST

Watch for caching birds, tucking seeds away as emergency food for winter.

The seabird migration has begun.

It's a great time to make sure your feeders are full of high energy foods, like suet which gets busy again during this time of the year.

Watch for second broods fledging.

Keep your eyes peeled for new faces like Pine Siskins and Red Crossbills moving in.

DELIVERY SCHEDULE FOR AUGUST

North Nanaimo to the Comox Valley

August 12th and August 26th

South Nanaimo to Duncan

August 5th and August 19th

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LOCAL FIELD NATURALIST GROUPS

[Nature Nanaimo](#) | [Arrowsmith Naturalists](#) | [Comox Valley Nature](#)
| [Cowichan Valley Naturalist Society](#) | [Malaspina Naturalists](#) |
[Rocky Point Bird Observatory](#) | [Saltspring Trail & Nature Club](#) |
[Victoria Natural History Society](#) | [Yellowpoint Ecological Society](#)

